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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KAWC](#) [ZF](#) [CG](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: (C) CATHOLIC INTERMEDIARY REQUESTS SUPPORT FOR HOSTAGE
RELEASE INITIATIVE

CLASSIFIED BY: Rafael Foley, Polchief.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (U) This is an action cable. See paragraph 8 for action.
S/A Wolpe and AF staff contributed to and cleared this cable.
End Comment.

12. (C) SUMMARY. Special Advisor for the Great Lakes Region
Howard Wolpe met with officials from Sant'Egidio, a lay Catholic
organization with experience in second-track negotiations in
several African conflicts. Sant'Egidio reported that senior
officials from the Hutu-extremist Forces Democratiques de
Liberation du Rwanda (FDLR) in Europe recently proposed
releasing the civilians that FDLR units in eastern Congo have
effectively held hostage, provided guarantees are made for
civilian hostage security. S/A Wolpe also met with Archbishop
Luigi Travaglini, the Vatican's point person for the Great Lakes
Region, who expressed grave concern for the situation in Eastern
Congo. End summary.

13. (C) On October 28 S/A Wolpe met with Sant'Egidio's Father
Matteo Zuppi. Zuppi reported direct contacts in the last two
weeks with FDLR officials in Europe, including FDLR's
German-based president Ignace Murwanashyaka. Zuppi's FDLR
interlocutors told him that the group had sustained little
damage from the Congolese army's recent military operations
against it. Nonetheless, Zuppi said that his sources -
corroborated by statements from missionaries in the
FDLR-affected area - report that the FDLR's civilian dependents
are pressing the group's military core to let them go. (Note:
the FDLR holds hostage the civilian dependents of its
rank-and-file soldiers to prevent the soldiers' defection. End
note).

14. (C) Zuppi's sources, including Murwanashyaka, said that the
FDLR is willing to release the civilians if their security is
guaranteed by the international community. Given the FDLR's
strong mistrust of both MONUC and the Congolese army, Zuppi's
FDLR sources would expect military protection from "people they
trust," which he interpreted as Tanzanian or Angolan soldiers,
possibly working under the UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) banner.

15. (C) Zuppi requested that the United States seek the DRC
government's assent to allow Sant'Egidio to travel to eastern
Congo and meet with FDLR military leaders to gather more
information. Zuppi acknowledged that FDLR's expatriate
leadership may not be able to speak for its military leadership.
He questioned Murwanashyaka's influence, calling him more of an
FDLR spokesman than a president. For this reason, Zuppi
proposed meeting with FDLR's military commanders to verify the
proposal relayed by FDLR expatriates; clarify their requests;
and clarify other key points of interest to Sant'Egidio and
others, including where the civilians would want to go and what
treatment FDLR proposed for its members who are wanted by
national or international law enforcement. (Note: Norway's

special envoy to the Great Lakes Region subsequently indicated to Wolpe that this proposal resembles other FDLR outreach in Oslo and Paris. End Note.)

16. (C) Zuppi stated that he contacted a DRC government official named Kaumba - whom he described as a successor to Samba Kibuto and a special advisor for security - who broadly supported the proposed Sant'Egidio visit but lacked the influence to persuade President Kabila. Zuppi said that he has not raised this issue with any officials in Rwanda but expects that it would "make them nervous." (Note: The GDRC official was likely Kabila's official national security chief, Kaumba Lufunda, who is often sidelined on security issues by the president's unofficial, much more influential and similarly-named Augustin Katumba Mwanke. End Note.)

17. (C) On October 29, S/A Wolpe met with Archbishop Travaglini, the Vatican's point person on the Great Lakes Region. Travaglini expressed grave concern for the plight of civilian populations in Eastern Congo, noting that Hutu extremists often move unchecked by the ineffective military. He added the Vatican welcomes USG attention to the Great Lakes Region and hoped that steps can be taken to reduce violence there. (Note: Sant'Egidio's humanitarian and peace building initiatives are consistent with Vatican foreign policy principles to promote peace and reconciliation. Sant'Egidio does not clear specific initiatives with the Vatican because, although it is recognized by the Vatican as an international Catholic association, it does not speak on behalf of the Vatican. End note.)

18. (C) S/A WOLPE COMMENT: The proposal that Zuppi reported is counter-intuitive given the FDLR leadership's reliance on holding hostage the civilian dependents of its rank-and-file soldiers to prevent their defection. However, Zuppi found the proposal credible and worthy of pursuing, arguing that military initiatives against the FDLR, well-targeted or not, will be unsuccessful. He states "the humanitarian path" is the only means of resolving the problem. He argued that FDLR leaders in the field may be looking for a way out of their current isolation that allows them to save face. The proposal Zuppi received may become overtaken by events. The proposed meeting with Sant'Egidio was to take place in Ntoto, a village the Congolese army reportedly captured. End comment.

19. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Embassy Vatican has good contacts with Sant'Egidio. Father Zuppi and other Sant'Egidio representatives will want to follow-up with Embassy Vatican their request that the United States seek the DRC government's assent to allow Sant'Egidio to travel to eastern Congo and meet with FDLR military leaders. Post requests guidance from Department on how to reply to the Sant'Egidio request.

DIAZ